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# To End Turf Wars That Foil Drug Control

By Joseph R. Biden Jr.

WASHINGTON — Turf wars among Government agencies responsible for Federal control of narcotics, long a major obstacle to such control, would finally be eliminated by a bill that is awaiting President Reagan's signature. If he succumbs to bureaucratic arguments to veto it, he will invite a severe setback to his own commendable efforts to control drug trafficking and the crime it spawns in every corner of this country.

Both houses of Congress, by overwhelming majorities, on Dec. 20 passed legislation that could end the infighting. The measure would lodge in one individual, at the Cabinet level, the authority and responsibility for coordinating the narcotics-control efforts of the 10 Federal agencies that share that responsibility.

If Mr. Reagan vetoes the measure, as some newspapers have reported he may, many agencies almost certainly will continue to subordinate their responsibility for stopping illegal drugs to what they perceive as their primary duties. Recent history is studded with examples of how bureaucratic inertia and conflict can divert attention from the critical job of controlling the drug trade.

- The Drug Enforcement Administration has failed at times to follow up on drug smuggling information provided by the Customs Service.

- The Drug Enforcement Administration, Internal Revenue Service and Customs Service have inflated their statistics on Government seizures of profits from the narcotics trade. All have, on occasion, taken credit for seizing the same illicit proceeds.

- Intelligence agencies have exhibited chronic, but not ill-founded, reluctance to collect information on drug trafficking for fear of getting entangled in court proceedings that might compromise their operations. (The Central Intelligence Agency, in 1979, unilaterally decided to reduce its commitment to the covert collection of narcotics intelligence abroad. There was virtually no one outside it with the authority and responsibility to protest.)

- The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters was not even consulted before the President, in October, unveiled his major, new drug-enforcement program, which establishes 12 regional task forces to crack down on drug trafficking nationwide. Funds for the department's programs aimed at cutting drug production abroad have been frozen despite the Attorney General's contention that a dollar spent abroad on such programs is worth \$10 spent on domestic law enforcement.

Agency infighting already has taken its toll of the Reagan program while it is still in the planning stage. For example, the Justice Department and other agencies have squabbled over control of the program's budget, and there have been arguments in the department over who will conduct prosecutions. I am not convinced that adequate consideration has been given to how the new task forces would mesh with existing organized-crime task forces or with a dozen United States attorneys, each responsible for an existing task force region and pursuing investigations that may overlap into other regions.

I seriously doubt that the ad hoc interagency committees the Administration created to coordinate Federal narcotics policy will do more than add another arena for bureaucratic combat. The bill going to the President presents a better alternative.

Congress has concluded that Federal coordination of drug control is so complex a job that it requires the attention and responsibility of one person. Cabinet-level status is necessary for the job to have the clout needed to impose a truce on interagency feuding, to insure maximum participation and to allocate budgetary resources for top efficiency and economy. Since the new officer would be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, the public would have one person to hold accountable for developing and implementing a specific, effective Federal strategy.

The agencies seem to be making two arguments for a veto. First, we are told, the new office would intimately involve the White House in day-to-day law-enforcement decisions. Actually, the office would have no police powers and could not be involved in individual law-enforcement decisions. Second, the public is told, still another bureaucracy would be created. But Congress was not envisioning more government; rather, the new office would meet its responsibilities with personnel and resources borrowed from existing agencies.

The Government will not be able to significantly strengthen drug enforcement until it puts someone in overall charge — until business-as-usual in Federal narcotics control ends. To counter the drug traffickers who have put this nation under siege, America needs a well-planned, well-coordinated, centrally directed and single-minded attack.

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